

## PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

**The Study of Public Administration.** Emphasis on the study of public administration has in recent years become so marked that of all the fields in the study of government it stands out as the most rapidly growing. What Woodrow Wilson called attention to some fifty years ago<sup>1</sup> has in fact become the center of interest in political science. No longer is hard study confined to the problem of making constitutions. The study of administration has concerned itself extensively with the processes and procedures, with the ways of carrying out public policy. However, Woodrow Wilson's advice, recommending the careful determination of the basic political conceptions necessary for the student of public administration, has not always been followed; and the present note is designed to suggest some factors bearing on these basic political conceptions. Specifically, it is to be emphasized that the means through which the state carries on its functions cannot be adequately analyzed except in relation to its ends.

Two illustrations may help to make clear the nature of the problem which the student of administration faces. First, the tendency to minimize or overlook the differences between the problems of public and business administration is not without its difficulties. For certain purposes, this tendency is good, for it is not here implied that similar techniques cannot be useful in government as well as in business. However, to the extent that techniques condition the character of purposes to be attained, it is plain that use of the practices of business as a yardstick for measuring the methods of government is in need of reappraisal. For the ends of private business are not those of the democratic state. And means must be analyzed in the light of ends.

The second illustration is related to the first. A sharp line has often been drawn between politics and administration. Even where a relationship between the two has been formally admitted, there is still only a hesitant willingness to discuss the objectives or purposes of the state in studying administrative activity. The ends of public action are usually looked upon as outside the field of the administrator. Since he is concerned almost solely with means, to suggest that the purposes for which administration exists have relevance for the study of his work is frequently thought to violate this conception of his function. In fact, consideration of ends is thought to be made impossible by the suggestion that administration is a science.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The Study of Administration," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 2, p. 197 (June, 1887), reprinted in *ibid.*, Vol. 56, p. 481 (Dec., 1941). See also the valuable reappraisal of this suggestive pioneer essay by Marshall E. Dimock, "The Study of Administration," in this REVIEW, Vol. 31, p. 28 (Feb., 1937).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Edwin O. Stene, "An Approach to a Science of Administration," in this REVIEW, Vol. 34, p. 1124 (Dec. 1940).

## I

When Robert Lynd asks *Knowledge for What?*,<sup>3</sup> he raises a question that can effectively stir up both the preoccupied professor and the active administrator. The clues that he and others suggest for an answer have nowhere greater significance than in an examination of what public administration means. For it is in dealing with the context of modern living that the problems of administration, beyond mere structure and mechanics, begin to appear; and it is in the postulates which he suggests as the basis for study that the most crucial questions concerning state action are found.

It is not necessary to emphasize through detailed discussion how the interaction of physical and social factors has drastically changed the situations with which the individual must deal today. Because of the development of an interdependent society, the need for collective or coöperative action at many points becomes apparent. In fact, there is no alternative to formal and informal coöperation for the satisfaction of needs. As a consequence, areas of group action have become so inclusive that there remain few areas in which the individual can claim sovereignty. Thus, the search for meaningful experience becomes increasingly tied in with the development of organized activity. The individual's opportunities for participation in shaping the forces which control his life depend upon organized activity. Organization alone can provide the basis for the kind of experience which Lynd and others describe as creative. It is in these factors that the characteristics of the study of administration are to be found. For the administration of the affairs of the state is concerned with the preëminent form of group action.

To say that organized effort is important in the development of the individual is not to overlook the fact that large numbers of people have little or no opportunity for genuine participation in such organized activity. Because they find themselves confronted with a world of impersonal forces shaping their lives despite their best efforts, they turn especially to government in their search for a sense of security, a sense of belonging. To escape a disorganized economic and social world which provides little room for the realization of the basic desires of many human beings,<sup>4</sup> men place increasing reliance on governmental action. And herein exists the difficulty about which the student of administration must be clear.

The extensive creation of governmental services to meet needs that are apparent in any city, and more recently in rural areas, illustrates the

<sup>3</sup> (Princeton, 1939).

<sup>4</sup> The problem is well illustrated in Elton Mayo, *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization* (New York, 1933).

problem in administration. The business of doing things *for* people has implicit in it an attack on the kind of self-reliance which is invaluable in any society that esteems human beings highly. Yet it is obvious that police protection, water supply, health service, housing, and many activities come within the range of public concern because no alternatives present themselves. The dilemma here is real and must be faced by students of administration.

Equally significant is the extension of public controls over many phases of economic life in recent decades. Both many liberals and Marxists<sup>5</sup> conceived of such extensions as appropriately arming the individual to contend with corporate giants around him. They sought in government the basis for a system of counter-powers in the liberal state to offset the concentration of economic controls in the hands of a small minority. They did not so clearly see, however, that they were not dealing with a problem in physics which demanded the balancing of one side of the scale against the other. They did not clearly appreciate that power, whether exercised by so-called private authority or by so-called public authority, had much the same meaning for those who exercised it, as well as for those who were affected by it. They were rather impressed with the apparent distinction between public and private, between political and non-political, authority. Without denying the existence of possible formal differentiations between the two, it is nevertheless important in administration to recognize that public and private power are similar, and even identical, in their meanings. But it is precisely in the recognition of this similarity, or identity, that a second dilemma appears. Power in the hands of government is not substantially different in its impact from power in the hands of so-called private groups.

The task of breaking through commitments to old symbols, to borrow the language of Gaus,<sup>6</sup> becomes most difficult with the realization that the extension of state power or the absorption of all power by the state has not automatically solved the problems of moving toward a better community. The state, whether liberal or Marxist, has as such not served to supply the new framework of reference for a larger sense of meaningfulness in the individual. Rather, it has in most cases been either an addition to other powers or a larger and more inclusive power to which the individual willy-nilly finds himself inescapably subject. The need for the development of new institutional frameworks, for new forms of organization, conceived as devices for making the individual more meaningful,

<sup>5</sup> See, for a recent statement, John Strachey's transitional program in *A Programme for Progress* (New York, 1940).

<sup>6</sup> "American Society and Public Administration," in John M. Gaus, Leonard D. White, and Marshall E. Dimock, *The Frontiers of Public Administration* (Chicago, 1936), p. 101.

thus requires attention from the student of administration, particularly if the aims and objectives of the service state are to mean more than a shift in power from private to public hands.

More specifically, advance in understanding of the governmental process depends on an abandonment of the simple faith in forms which has too often characterized not only the reformer but even the revolutionary. To assume, for example, that the substitution of public for private ownership of a utility or banking system, or that the replacement of one governing élite by another, means an automatic step in the direction of a better society is to betray a dangerous lack of understanding of the significance of power.<sup>7</sup>

Stated positively, what is urged here is greater concern in the study of administration with its potential meaning for the achievement of a fuller democracy. As has been well pointed out by John D. Lewis, consent is the principal element of democracy.<sup>8</sup> But consent must operate increasingly beyond the areas which are now thought of as properly within the sphere of politics. It is not adequate to assume in the study of administration that the machinery of consent must be confined to the political level. In fact, to the extent that consent implies more than mechanical acquiescence in matters only of remote personal significance—to the extent that consent must rest on a genuine stake in the outcome of the process of choice—to that extent attention must be directed to those points in the workings of government where decisions are genuinely and obviously vital to the individual.

Here, then, is suggested a view to supplement that which concerns itself primarily with structure and mechanics in the study of administration. Likewise, the position here taken would go beyond that which looks upon the study of administration as concerned chiefly with the most successful exploitation of man-power, money, and materials, in the service of any master, for any purpose, subject only to the direction of politics. Rather, the study of administration must, it seems, become also, and perhaps especially at present, the study of the process of social change and of the means for making such change best serve the ends of a more truly democratic society. In the following are suggested two areas for further study of the process of administration in the light of what has been said.

<sup>7</sup> Attention is being given increasingly to the need for throwing off simple faith in the idea of automatic progress to a better social order. See, for example, Lewis Corey, "Marxism Reconsidered," *The Nation*, Vol. 150, pp. 245-248, 272-275, 305-307 (February 17, 24, and March 2, 1940); and Max Eastman, *Stalin's Russia and the Crisis in Socialism* (New York, 1940).

<sup>8</sup> "The Elements of Democracy," in this REVIEW, Vol. 34, p. 467 (June, 1940).

## II

Under the relatively primitive conditions of the police state, the processes of administration were intimately tied up with the courts. Law-enforcement involved essentially coercion of individuals by means of retribution for past actions contrary to public policy. The administrator's job under those circumstances was chiefly one of discovering who the lawbreaker was, what the lawbreaking action had been, and how a jury of the lawbreaker's peers might be convinced of his guilt. Coercion in this sense is supplemented today by new and more complex techniques.

Government seeks at present to control complicated processes through the application to them of equally complicated administrative techniques. Remote and impersonal experts are increasingly relied on to interpret public policies for the individuals whom they affect. The result has been, in many cases, one in which the individual finds himself compelled to follow complicated orders and directions without any clear understanding of their meaning or significance. Coercion in a new sense can thus emerge. For not only may the individual be cut off from knowledge of the process which affects him; he may also be vitally and helplessly dependent upon his own submission to the action of the administrator, as, for example, when such action has a direct relation to his health. Obviously, the expert in a position of power is indispensable, for only through the division of labor which his expertness manifests is it possible to deal with the complicated and technical interrelations of present-day living. Obviously, too, the threat to the affected human beings of the expert in power cannot be overlooked. The dilemma is only partially solved through political controls, since they too operate remotely, at the top. The problem of the student of administration is to direct inquiry toward implementing the concept of the citizen as participant in the process of government by means more significant than the suffrage, toward the discovery of what might be called coöperative methods of policy execution.<sup>9</sup>

From a slightly different point of view, coöperative methods of policy execution suggest the need for a determined search for the public interest.<sup>10</sup> Its discovery, among other things, depends upon the extent to which the administrator can call upon those affected by his action to assist in shaping administrative policy. Some such coöperation in search of the public interest takes the form of new mechanisms like the trade practice conferences of the Federal Trade Commission. On another level,

<sup>9</sup> The additional factor is not to be overlooked that it is sometimes quite futile to attempt simple coercion to get a job done. Thus, many action programs must come to rest on coöperation between official and citizen.

<sup>10</sup> For an illuminating discussion, see E. P. Herring, *Public Administration and the Public Interest* (New York and London, 1936), esp. pp. 334 ff.

however, coöperation in the search for public interest, supplementing other administrative techniques, suggests an area for fruitful study in a new direction. What mechanisms exist, or can be developed, to create a genuine stake in the governmental process for the ordinary individual affected by it? What is meant to be emphasized here is the thought that the relationship between administrator and citizen must be viewed not alone as a momentary contact. Rather it must be considered as a continuing process, an interaction between affected citizens and administrators, out of which the public interest can become articulate. In this view, the focus of the study of administration becomes such that both official and citizen are considered as continuously related.

New administrative techniques might be examined in a number of agencies of government to discover what the forms and methods of coöperation in the execution of policy are. Can new techniques prevent the service state from creating merely additional power patterns? Among others, the Tennessee Valley Authority provides one of the most significant case studies, from which the following illustrative materials are cited<sup>11</sup> to suggest possible approaches for further study.

As a part of the task of water control, the T.V.A. is organized to get at rural insecurity. Such dramatic doings as the construction of dams receive, of course, first attention as central to the problem of the control and intelligent use of resources. However, reorganizing the economy of the Valley for a better life is a second, but by no means secondary, purpose of the T.V.A.

Coöperative execution of policy is central in the work of the T.V.A. Not only would it be impractical to attempt to maintain a formal administrative establishment large enough to do all that needs doing in the effort to conserve and use more intelligently the water and soil resources of the Valley. That fact in itself, however, does not constitute the principal reason for reliance on coöperation. Since the job of the T.V.A. is one of reorganizing the living of several million individuals to conform better to their whole environment, they must in a democracy be themselves participants in redirecting their own lives. It is at this point particularly that coercion fails, that the consent and active coöperation of those directly concerned must become the foundation of administrative action.

To create a new consciousness of the soil, the T.V.A. sought through coöperative methods to arouse interest in the desirability of doing something about the land. Two programs illustrate the methods used. Individual farmers were asked to study the characteristics of the land on their farms and to grade it according to its productivity. While an expert in

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed description of some of the practices referred to below, see E. S. Wengert, "T.V.A. Enlists Local Coöperation," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 1, p. 97 (Apr., 1937).

soils might have undertaken the classification, the T.V.A. sought rather to initiate a coöperative approach to the problem of better organizing land use. Thus a foundation was laid for ultimately bringing lay farmer and soil expert together, not as only remotely related to one another, but as participants in the solution of a joint problem. The second illustrative program operated through county groups, organized into soil conservation associations. The T.V.A. sought out community leaders to show the way to their fellow-farmers through demonstrations of the possibilities of more intelligent practices. Thus was created a community interest in a common problem and a willingness to organize for its solution. Better planning and land use, collective ownership of heavy farm machinery, and the continuous application of the best knowledge to the problems in the small area of the county—all have grown out of the association of administrator and citizen, of expert and layman, in a new form of coöperative undertaking, an undertaking in keeping with the over-all program of the T.V.A.

In summary, the theory of organization in the T.V.A. emphasizes the consciously creative rather than the coercive. The complicated relationships between water, soil, crops, economics, and human beings are explored by men with skill and expertness who are, in the traditional sense, the administrators. In addition to these, however, individual inhabitants of the Valley take an increasing part in guiding the solution of these problems. In the operations of the T.V.A., "citizen" is redefined; the individual is made an official in a more important sense than Dewey's.<sup>12</sup> Not only is he a voter. He is an official in that, without title, without legal position, he nevertheless actively shares in making public policy concrete. All of this rests on a keen appreciation of the character of existing institutions and symbols, on their adaptation and redirection to new ends.

### III

A second important area for further study in administration relates to the internal aspects of the administrative process. Particularly, the adequacy of traditional concepts, carried over from earlier times and different situations from those at present, might be reëxamined. It will be well to suggest some of the points at which further study might be appropriate.

The concept of hierarchy is related to command and obedience. The suggestion that lines of authority be drawn clearly, that each individual in an administrative structure know precisely whom he commands and whom he obeys, reflects the military origins of much thinking about hierarchy.<sup>13</sup> The essence of the army is force; implicit obedience is a useful

<sup>12</sup> John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems* (New York, 1927), p. 75.

<sup>13</sup> Not all thinking about organization is done in these terms. See, notably, John M. Gaus, "A Theory of Organization in Public Administration," in John M. Gaus, Leonard D. White, and Marshall E. Dimock, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-91.

tool for making that force effective. But organization viewed from the standpoint of the military is not necessarily appropriate for solution of the problems of civil government.

The difficulty implied is aggravated when students of administration see in the experience of industry all the answers to the problems of public administration. It is not always clearly recognized that industrial administration continues to approximate more nearly in methods the administration of the army, or that it represents only a point between the relatively coercive methods of the army and the relatively non-coercive methods that must be used increasingly in civil administration.

In the practice of the army, as well as of most industry, organization functions chiefly as a limitation on individuals.<sup>14</sup> Only a portion of their energies is then directed into an enterprise. They are not called upon to contribute to it as individuals acting voluntarily, but rather they are commanded to do their duties. The business of living remains distinct from the business of working. In contrast, the desirability of recognizing the importance of "creative management" deserves emphasis.<sup>15</sup> Here, then, is suggested a basis for differentiating between the traditional pattern of military or industrial organization and the organization of the affairs of the state. This concept might be explored in a number of administrative agencies, where conscious effort is made to draw from the organization's members creative contributions to its purposes, as, for example, in the T.V.A.

Creative management involves extension of the notion that administration is an educative process to the relations within the administrative organization. Not only may the process educate those citizens affected by a policy; it may be an educational experience as well for those who direct it. The official then may act in a new rôle as teacher and as learner. This notion might be labeled "engineering of consent," with the understanding that there is implied no suggestion of manipulation, but only of the creation of arrangements conducive to the maintenance of consensual relations, both within and without the administrative structure.

In this view, the hierarchy no longer serves as a description merely of relations of command and obedience. It becomes, rather, what might be called a channel for communication—a mechanism through which intelligence moves from top to bottom and bottom to top. Two problems then emerge as worthy of further examination. The first has to do with the

<sup>14</sup> Even where the conditions of modern warfare demand individual initiative and ingenuity, the execution of military policy rests on the self-denial implicit in strict obedience.

<sup>15</sup> Ordway Tead, *Creative Management* (New York, 1935), and also the same author's *New Adventures in Democracy* (New York and London, 1939), esp. Chaps. 5, 9, 13.

recognition of the importance of the individual employee in the process of communication; the second is concerned with keeping the channels of communication open, so that the superior or expert may be in touch with the whole of the staff, as well as with the individuals affected by its actions. Here the internal phases of administration touch on the external.

The most significant item in the suggested reappraisal of the meaning of hierarchy is probably to be found in the need for the creation for the employee of a genuine stake in the aims of the agency of which he is a part. Just as the citizen affected by government may be overwhelmed as easily by public authority as by private, so too the employee in a public agency may find his employment no more meaningful than in a private agency. In this area, the study of self-organization might be most suggestive, not only for its meaning in collective bargaining, but also for its bearing on the problem of realizing the greatest possible contribution of each individual to the aims of the organization. The communication of intelligence through the hierarchy may therein be substantially aided.

Relating the work of the superior or expert at the top to that of his subordinates constitutes another phase of the task of effective organization. At this point, the general staff function might be reexamined for its possible usefulness in providing new mechanisms for communication. The general staff is most frequently conceived of as expediting the process of command. Thus is reflected its military origins. In addition, however, it might be possible to view the general staff function as a means for relating actively the top control of an organization to those directly engaged in the process of winning consent for its programs of action. Concretely, the representative in the field serves the purposes of his organization better to the extent that his ideas and reflections upon his problems can be effectively brought to bear on the policies of the whole organization. Even more: the element of remoteness, suggested above, as government undertakes increasingly difficult tasks and technical operations can be reduced in significance as the expert is made to respond to stimuli from the outside. The general staff may be useful in making such stimuli effective. For it is easy enough, as a rule, for the head to command the action of his subordinates; it is less easy by far for the subordinate to make available what he knows best and most intimately to the head. The result has been not only a loss in administrative effectiveness, but a destruction of potential strength in carrying out complicated programs democratically. This view clearly reemphasizes administration as essentially a process of education.

From these considerations emerge a number of suggestions for study with particular reference to developing institutional patterns. The conception of the administrator-citizen provides a first clue to an understanding of the ways and means of getting around the dilemma of the

liberal who is caught between private power on the one hand and public power on the other. A second clue is found in the participating employee who serves as a complement to the administrator-citizen. In fact, the distinction between the two is so difficult to draw that it must be recognized that the one can hardly come into existence without the other.

Discoverable institutional developments suggest the possibility of finding the basis for more meaningful democracy in which a self-conscious public begins to appear—self-conscious because of its stake in the process of government. Likewise the bewildering threat to democratic institutions, implicit in the need for increasing reliance on government by experts, is met as people begin to learn by doing the tasks of government in which they have a genuine stake. However, clues and suggestions are not enough. The student of administration is called upon consciously to direct attention to the possibility of perfecting, not merely better mechanisms as such, but better mechanisms adapted to democratic ends, in keeping with the best understanding of human beings and human institutions.

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